A system to save a life

Emergency medical services systems in Texas

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More than 44,000 certified EMS professionals provide emergency medical care in Texas by working or volunteering for the 1,300 EMS systems in the state. There are many types of EMS systems: fire department EMS systems; separate systems called third city service systems; volunteer EMS systems; city-county partnerships; privately-owned EMS services; county EMS departments; and first responder groups who treat the patient on scene until another service arrives to transport the patient.

No matter what type of system an area operates, EMS personnel must meet high standards for education and training, testing, and certification as EMS technicians. The EMS Act, a state law, requires that ambulances making emergency runs be inspected and licensed by the Texas Department of Health and staffed by at least two EMS-certified professionals.

But an EMS system is more than ambulances and EMS professionals. An EMS system includes EMS instructors, dispatchers, medical directors, emergency nurses, emergency flight crews and emergency physicians.

An EMS system also includes the technology used in the hospital, the emergency department, and diagnostic labs; at the colleges and universities teaching EMS courses; and in the dispatch and communications centers.

An EMS system includes law enforcement organizations, first responder groups, funding agencies, regulatory bodies and public education programs. And, most of all, an EMS system includes you. EMS needs you to make the first emergency call that swings the components of an EMS system into action. Without that call, there is no EMS.

It's a system to save a life.

Basic Life Support

Most communities in Texas have an EMS system capable of at least Basic Life Support care. This means that Emergency Care Attendants (ECAs) and Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) are trained to help you in the following ways:

Airway Management In a patient whose heart has stopped, the technique of providing ventilation and chest compressions called cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) circulates life-giving blood. ECAs and EMTs make sure that the airway is not restricted and assist the patient's breathing as needed.

Bleeding Control There is more to bleeding control than wrapping the injured area. ECAs and EMTs are taught to recognize arterial and venous bleeding and to restrict blood flow using pressure points, to prevent infection and to avoid further injury.

Splinting Broken bones can easily cause further injury. EMS personnel learn to stabilize fractures using slings and splints.

Extrication Removing victims from wrecked automobiles is a delicate procedure. ECAs and EMTs learn how to stabilize parts of the body likely to be injured, such as the neck, before freeing victims from vehicles.

Transportation Safety is the first priority, so ambulances traveling at regular speeds are used to transport most emergency patients. Once EMS personnel have stabilized the victim, speed isn't all-important, but safety is.

Advanced Life Support

Many Texas communities have chosen to provide Advanced Life Support care which in some areas includes a Mobile Intensive Care Unit (MICU) vehicle. This means that in addition to Basic Life Support, paramedics are qualified to perform advanced airway management, intravenous (IV) therapy skills and cardiac therapy when directed by their supervising physician. Paramedics learn these skills by completing about 1200 hours of classroom and hospital training. Intermediate EMTs complete about 300 hours of training in advanced life support airway management and IV therapy.

Advanced Life Support requires hospital personnel who can continue procedures begun by EMS personnel; radio contact between the emergency department and paramedics in the field; larger ambulances with more supplies; and medical supervision by a doctor who trains paramedics and supervises the performance of the following advanced skills:

Airway Management The survival of crash victims sometimes depends on a simple thing such as the ability to breathe. Training in airway management teaches paramedics to insert devices into the trachea of an unconscious patient to help keep the airway open.

IV Therapy And Medications As a patient's blood pressure drops, death becomes more likely. Paramedics can give IV fluids to raise blood pressure by replacing lost fluids. Especially important for trauma, shock, burns and heat stroke, IV therapy also provides a means of injecting medications helpful to a cardiac patient.

Cardiac Therapy Many heart attack victims are alive today because paramedics rushed to the scene within minutes to give emergency care. Specialized training in advanced life support care increases a patient's chance of survival after heart attacks or sudden cardiac death.

Paramedics use a portable heart monitor to perform EEGs and defibrillators to provide electric shock to a patient's non-beating heart.

The First Critical Minutes

A medical emergency is sudden. It's frightening. And what happens in the first critical minutes can mean the difference between life and death.

A blocked airway, careless movement of a fractured spine, unchecked bleeding, an apparently lifeless heart—all can bring further injury or death.

That's why emergency medical services systems exist throughout Texas to help victims survive those first critical minutes.

EMS offices can answer questions about public education, EMS training, personnel certification, provider licensing, EMS legislation and rules. Offices can provide consultation in the improvement of an EMS system and design of an emergency medical communications system.

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EMS-012 8/98

Texas Department of Health EMS Offices

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